

NINA MOINI: For the better part of this year, Annunciation Church and School parents were engaging with lawmakers to advocate for legislative change following the mass shooting. The session has ended, but the work of the Annunciation Light Alliance has not. They're now turning to more public engagement. On Monday, the group is partnering with CBS News correspondent Steve Hartman to show his Oscar-winning documentary, *All the Empty Rooms*, followed by a panel discussion with Steve and Annunciation parents at the Main Cinema in Minneapolis.

Joining us now is Kristen Neville, co-chair of the Annunciation Light Alliance. Thanks for coming back on the show, Kristen.

KRISTEN NEVILLE: Hi, Nina, thanks so much for having me.

NINA MOINI: And we're also thrilled to be joined by Steve Hartman. Thanks so much for taking the time today, Steve.

STEVE HARTMAN: It is no problem. Glad to be here as well.

NINA MOINI: Steve, I'd love to start with you. For people unfamiliar with *All the Empty Rooms*, unfortunately those rooms are empty because they belong to children whose lives were taken in school shootings. And we wondered why you decided to frame the stories of these families around these untouched rooms and how that's resonated with audiences so far.

STEVE HARTMAN: Well, going back decades, I was the guy who had to come up with the-- I do the light-hearted feature stories. So at the end of every week when there was a school shooting, it kind of fell to me to find some positive angle, some uplifting thing, like the hero teacher or the community coming together, something like that. And I was just tired of doing it, frankly.

And I felt at the same time that the country was growing numb to these tragedies. And I was growing numb to these tragedies. So I was actually trying to restore some empathy, shake people out of that numbness. And I thought, maybe if people could stand inside those empty rooms, that maybe some empathy would be restored. And to help people stand in those rooms, we would share pictures of really intense and powerful images of those bedrooms.

NINA MOINI: Kristen, hearing some of that makes you think about all this intentional work that your entire community is doing. You're just pouring yourselves into having these conversations and trying to reach people where they are. I know you and I have talked about that in the past. If you can reach people who are in their communities and have these engaging conversations, how are you hoping that a documentary film like this, to Steve's point, can help people engage in a different way and then maybe unlock different parts of themselves?

KRISTEN Yeah, I think that, similarly to what Steve said, and part of the reason why we reached out to connect with *All the Empty Rooms* and Steve and his team is that there's a mission and a message that we really collectively align on. And it's a lot of where the Annunciation Light Alliance, I would say, kind of got rooted in. And so when we think about this event specifically, part of what we are hoping to be able to have people think about and take away is, similarly, having a deeper understanding of the families behind these stories and a renewed appreciation for how precious every child is, that when something like this happens, it impacts something much greater and much deeper.

And I think one of the things that we found, especially within the Annunciation community, but broadly, and as we've connected with so many other communities that have been impacted by tragedy like this, is that it's something that just doesn't end, right? And our hope is that, as a result of that, that attendees have an opportunity to really recognize that grief. And that it doesn't necessarily have to be something that we need to isolate ourselves in. Instead, we can come together with compassion. We can carry one another, like we've been able to do throughout this last year. And that we can also be able to really work alongside of the great work that Steve and his team did, which is where this film really addresses heartbreaking loss. It also highlights resilience, love, and the ways in which people find hope, even after the unimaginable tragedy happens.

NINA MOINI: It's so important. Steve, I wonder, in other screenings that you've held, if the people who show up are oftentimes people who feel a really close connection to a horrible tragedy like this. But I wonder what you would say to people who have not had those experiences, for maybe them to come out, because I think it can be a difficult topic and very emotional for people. And people might shy away if they're not so entrenched in a cause. But what would you say to people who want to be a part of the conversation but may almost feel like they shouldn't even go?

STEVE HARTMAN: Right, I mean, this has been a problem. There's a lot of people, some of my bosses at CBS News included, who say things like, oh, that's just going to be too hard for me. I don't know if I could watch that. One, nobody who's watched the film has walked away saying, I wish I didn't see that. There's more hope, and there's even some laughs in there. And yes, there's a lot of tears, and there's a lot of sadness. But yeah, that's life. And this is something that we need to face. And I hope that people who feel some reluctance hear me when I say, you will not regret watching this film.

And I think we owe it to the families who want desperately for their child to be remembered, to at least give them the 30 minutes. And that's how long the film is. Give them the 30 minutes to know get to their children. And maybe, once people allow themselves to feel that deeply, to have their empathy restored, I think that's step one to solving the problem, whether that's guns or whatever it is. The film is not about guns. It never mentions guns. But whatever the solution may be, I don't think we're going to reach it until we start to feel really deeply how important it is to resolve this problem.

NINA MOINI: Kristen, what do you think about what Steve's saying?

KRISTEN Yeah, I couldn't agree more. I think that one of the areas that we have found to be incredibly impactful through our work has been through storytelling, even in the advocacy work that we did and how we looked at the tragedy that happened and how that led up to it. It still is really rooted in the storytelling and the human side of who we are and the individuals that were a part of that tragic event, the lives that were lost and the lives that are still here that are dealing with this grief and trauma specifically.

And I think one of the pieces that we have found that we really want to continue to focus on is not creating space for debate but rather for reflection, for compassion, and ultimately for conversation. This is a difficult topic. It's a polarizing topic. And how do we work towards depolarization? It's something that we found to be really impactful, right?

Nina, I think in your question, and Stephen, your answer, with regards to some of the individuals at CBS that are like, this is too hard, we found the same thing in some of the facilitated conversations that we've had with first responders. First responders that attended, that were there, they responded on August 27, who can't go home because they can't have conversations with their family members because it's too hard of a topic-- and this is an opportunity to really cool things down, right? It's an opportunity for us to open and engage and talk about what matters, which is about our communities, our kids, and the individuals that have been impacted by these events and find that human connection part of it.

NINA MOINI: And how does it fit in, Kristen, with some more of the work that the Alliance is going to be doing? We talked about the session is over, heading into the summer and into the fall. What is that looking like for you?

KRISTEN NEVILLE: Yeah, I think that you look at the session, and I think we're super-proud of that work. Being a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, it's not just about advocacy. It's not always about something that is large. It sometimes is about listening. It's about showing up. And it's about caring for our neighbors and being able to have that compassion and be together. And I think that when we look at the work that we're looking to do, it's about balancing that. And it's about being able to connect in and have conversations that can be difficult, to talk about a topic that is not an easy one, and really think about what matters.

And at the end of the day, I don't think that anybody can say, I don't care about our children. I don't care about our communities. And so that is a pathway that we will continue to focus on. We've got some really incredible events that are coming up. Obviously, the one that's on Monday that we get to be able to partner in with Steve and with his team on, we're really looking forward to. And then other events where we are engaging with communities in facilitated conversations and panel conversations, really to again, talk about storytelling, right, engage with what does this look like. How does it impact us? And why does it matter?

And so those are some of the things that we're really focused on trying to be able to do. And also help remind people that as a community, we're not alone. We're here together. And honestly, healing often begins with those relationships. And so that will be an area that we'll continue to center ourselves on, as we have since the August 27 tragedy.

NINA MOINI: Kristen, thanks so much for continuing to share with us and joining us again. And Steve, really appreciate you and your work as well. Thank you both.

STEVE HARTMAN: Thank you.

KRISTEN NEVILLE: Thank you, Nina.

NINA MOINI: Kristen Neville is co-chair of the Annunciation Light Alliance. And Steve Hartman is a CBS News correspondent and part of the documentary *All the Empty Rooms*.